



AP Human Geography

Cultural Relativism in Tattoos

Name:

Section:

Score: ____/5

Directions: Answer the following questions relating to the topic of tattooing, then read the two different views of tattoos by the Church of Latter Day Saints (Mormons) and the traditions of tattooing in Polynesia.

Thought Questions:

Pre-Reading Discussion Questions:

1. What are your own personal beliefs about tattooing? What has influenced your ideas on tattoos?
2. How does your particular cultural group view tattoos? (Ethnic, Religious, Youth vs. Adults, etc...)
3. Based off your own ideas what do tattoos reveal about a person/person's decisions.

Reading Questions

1. What are the Mormon's views towards tattoos and their reasoning for those views?
2. What are the Polynesian views towards tattoos and their reasoning for those views?
3. Which set of views most closely corresponds to your own beliefs of tattoos? Explain how.

Tattoos in Mormon Culture vs. Polynesia Culture

The Spiritual Consequences (Mormon)

Dr. Mark Taylor, a dermatologist in Salt Lake City, sees patients who want to have tattoos removed. Dr. Taylor indicates that the laser process is expensive and that certain tattoo colors cannot be removed very easily. He finds it unfortunate that something done on a whim, almost like doodling, now costs time, money, energy, and pain to remove. "Tattoos connote, in my opinion," says Dr. Taylor, "a lack of judgment, lack of forethought, lack of being able to see into the future and understand consequences."

As a member of the Church, Dr. Taylor is concerned about the spiritual consequences his patients have had to face. "If you wear anything on your body that discourages the presence of the Spirit, that conveys a message of disobedience or rebellion," says Dr. Taylor, "it becomes discouraging to spirituality."

Having a tattoo or body piercing can also be offensive to others. Employers may not want an employee representing his business who has tattoos or body piercings.

As members of the Church, we are instructed not to give offense. "People taunt others by these outward acts," says Dr. Taylor. "A pure body, unmarked, is not offensive."

Some members of a congregation may be distracted from the reverent feelings they come to church services to gain, by the piercings or tattoos of those called upon to bless or pass the sacrament or participate in the program.

Dr. Taylor has come up with two questions that are good to ask before undertaking any sort of fad. "Will it make me feel differently or negatively about myself? Will it make other people feel differently about me? If the answer is yes to either question, then it's probably not a good idea to do it. For example, a woman having pierced ears does not make me think differently of her. However, for men, it makes me feel differently about them if I see them with pierced ears."

Thomas, Janet. "More Than Skin Deep." Editorial. New Era Feb. 2001: n. pag. More Than Skin Deep - New Era Feb. 2001 - New-era. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. Web. 02 Mar. 2015.

A Sacred Art (Polynesian)

Tattooing is a sacred ceremony in Polynesian culture. The tattoos and their location on the body were determined by one's genealogy, position within the society and personal achievements. According to the culture of Maori, all high-ranking Māori were tattooed, and those who went without tattoos were seen as people with lowest social level.

On the basis of mythology, human learned the art of tattooing from the 2 sons of the God of Creation Ta'aroa. Tattooing was operated by high trained shamans (tahua) in the religious ceremony, who was an expert in the meanings of the tattoo and skills of the art.

Before getting tattooed, a person should experience a long period of cleansing. During this period one would fast for a fixed length of time and abstaining from sexual intercourse or contact with women. The tattoo practice generally marked both rites of passage and important events in a person's life. The addition of tattoos also made a warrior much more attractive to women.

Generally, the head was considered the most sacred part of the body, and because tattooing caused blood to run, the tattoo craftsmen, or "tohunga-ta-oko", were very tapu persons. The full faced tattoo was very time consuming, and a skilled tattoo craftsman would carefully study a person's bone structure before getting his art process start.

Tattooing Related to Women

Generally, the women were not as extensively tattooed as the men. The position of tattoo on women's body was limited to hand, arms, feet, ears and lips. One saying is that girls at the age of twelve would get tattooed on their right hands, and since when they were permitted to prepare the meals and join in the process of rubbing of dead bodies.

"Introduction of Polynesian Tattoo History." APolynesianTattoo. N.p., n.d. Web. 02 Mar. 2015.

